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## The Sense of Effectiveness in Public Affairs

By

Elizabeth Douvan

*Survey Research Center, University of  
Michigan*

and

Alan M. Walker

*Earlham College*

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"Relative Visual Direction as a Factor in Relative Distance  
Perceptions," by Walter C. Gogel.

#### ERRATA

- P. 17. Left Column. For  $\sqrt{3/3}$  read  $\sqrt{3}/3$ , in lines 35 and 43.
- P. 18. Left Column. For "The presence or absence of the physical terms  $m$  and  $y$  . . ." read "The presence or absence of the physical terms  $m$  and  $y$  . . ."
- P. 19. For (Accepted for publication November 3, 1956) read (Accepted for publication November 3, 1955).

For the purpose of this investigation, the following  
values have been determined for the various  
properties of the material.

#### APPENDIX

1. The first column of the table gives the  
values of the various properties of the material  
as determined by the various methods.
2. The second column of the table gives the  
values of the various properties of the material  
as determined by the various methods.
3. The third column of the table gives the  
values of the various properties of the material  
as determined by the various methods.

## Psychological Monographs: General and Applied

## The Sense of Effectiveness in Public Affairs\*

ELIZABETH DOUVAN

*Survey Research Center, University of Michigan*

AND ALAN M. WALKER

*Earlham College*

## I. THE PROBLEM

## A. INTRODUCTION

THE ubiquitous phenomenon of the nonparticipating citizen has become a concern, not only to political scientists and political theorists, but to social scientists across discipline lines. It has become increasingly well recognized that the behavior of that large portion of our population which does not vote and takes no interest in public affairs requires for its analysis a multivariable scheme. While it is useful to inspect particular elections for conditions which may account for lack of interest, it is also fruitful to approach the problem at a psychological level and inquire into the motivational and attitudinal structure which distinguishes the interested from the apathetic citizen.

A variable that has attracted considerable interest and has proved useful

in efforts of the latter kind is an attitude we have called the "sense of effectiveness"—that is, the feeling or sense of being an effective agent in the world of public affairs. One group of authors, speaking of a "sense of political efficacy," define it as "the feeling that individual political action does have or can have an impact upon the political process . . . that political and social change is possible and that the individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change" (3, p. 187). It is this psychological variable and its determinants with which the present analysis is concerned.

A part of the analysis from the present study, which is reported elsewhere (4), was designed to test the hypothesis that people who feel effective will be characterized by more highly differentiated attitudes and a livelier interest in particular public issues than will people who feel unable to have any influence in the political sphere. Consistent attitudinal differences were found among groups based on a measure of effectiveness.

In the analysis presented in the present report, we have focused on the question of the position of the sense of effectiveness in the individual's psychological structure. In the first section the question posed is that of the generality of

\* The study reported here was done in the Public Affairs Program of the Survey Research Center, of which Stephen B. Withey is Program Director. Professor Angus Campbell, the Center's director, Benjamin J. Darsky, and Professor Max L. Hutt all made major contributions to the design of the study. Support for the research was granted by the Phoenix Project of the University of Michigan, a memorial fund dedicated to research on peacetime implications of atomic energy. We are deeply grateful for Phoenix support, without which the study would not have been possible.

effectiveness as a psychological characteristic; in the second we present an analysis of certain projective materials in an effort to clarify the relationship of this attitudinal variable to two ego-level personality factors.

## B. METHODS OF THE PRESENT INVESTIGATION

### 1. Subjects and Procedure

Data for the analysis were derived from a personal interview survey conducted with 316 members of the labor-force population of Detroit. The complex area sample design customarily employed by the Survey Research Center was the basis for the original selection of respondents.<sup>1</sup> The interview for the present study was administered only to members of the sample who were employed, seeking employment, or only temporarily unemployed.

Interviewing was done in respondents' homes by trained interviewers. A standard questionnaire was used, and in most cases the questions were of an "open-ended" type permitting full and free responses.

### 2. Measures

a. *Control procedures.* Riesman and Glazer (9) have defined apathy in psychological terms—and have embraced within the concept the two variables of affect and competence. They maintain that competence alone—that is, the feeling that one can have an effect on political events, without an accompanying attachment to the world of public affairs in the form of a lively interest in or concern about it—is not enough to distinguish a person as having an effective orientation toward political events.

<sup>1</sup>A detailed description of this sampling method is presented by Kish (6).

In the present study we were concerned primarily with the sense of effectiveness—a variable similar to the "competence" which these authors treat. The variable of affective involvement, however, entered our study design as a control for the following reason.

The problem of enlisting the motivation of subjects in an experiment or study is common to many areas of psychological research.<sup>2</sup> We might anticipate that lack of involvement toward the task would be a particularly grave and common source of error in studies of attitudes toward objects or issues remote from subjects' lives. Such questions, if asked in the abstract, would have relatively little meaning to many people, and would elicit little psychological involvement.

We therefore asked the questions on citizen influence—designed to measure the sense of effectiveness—in the context of two problems of broad national significance—the threat of atomic war and the problem of inflation.

Following this discussion, we put to respondents the questions on citizen influence. These were phrased in general terms about the influence a citizen could have on decisions like *these* (relating to the problems—e.g., what steps to take to prevent war, whether to build an H-

<sup>2</sup>The significance of this problem of enlistment of involvement for the general questions of reliability and validity of measures is particularly great in attitude research. When we make predictions about relationships among attitudinal variables, we in a sense assume that motivation toward the task of responding to question-measures is relatively constant for all subjects. Either a lack of motivation toward the task (wherein responses to various questions may be superficial or dictated by fluctuating whim) or the presence of extraneous motivation (e.g., the desire to avoid revealing one's true attitude) may create error in the test of an essentially correct hypothesis.



bomb, how to control inflation).<sup>3</sup> The emphasis in the discussion of problems was on the threat of atomic war, and government decisions demanded by this threat. More questions were asked about this problem than about the economic issue. It is also a more affect-laden issue for most people, and did elicit more emotionally colored responses. It was this issue which set the tone of the discussion.

If in response to the questions on war threat there was an indication that the respondent felt no involvement in the issue—because he felt the possibility of war an unreal threat—he was dropped from the analysis of effectiveness. Since he did not accept the reality of the problem context of the interview, it was felt that his answers to questions about the influence people could have on such issues would not be based on a suitable level of involvement. A subsidiary analysis was made on these cases, and is reported elsewhere (4).

Responses to the following question and probe were inspected in this control procedure.

a. Would you say you're very concerned about it (the threat of war), not at all concerned, or what?

b. How do you mean?

Two groups of respondents were eliminated on this basis: those referred to in the previous paragraph, who were not concerned because they did not consider the problem real—they did not think there was any threat of war (48 cases); and those who were not concerned be-

cause they had such faith in the nation's leadership that they felt all would be well (12 cases).

b. *The sense of effectiveness.* The remaining cases were grouped into three categories of felt effectiveness in the following way: a direct question was asked about the extent to which the average citizen can influence government decisions:<sup>4</sup> "How much of an influence do you think the average citizen can have on decisions like these?" Respondents were divided into two groups on the basis of responses to this question—those who thought that they could have "quite a lot" or "some" power, and those who felt they could have "very little" or "none!" A sizable number of respondents mentioned spontaneously, when the problem of war was discussed, that they felt they personally could have no effect

TABLE I  
EFFECTIVENESS CATEGORIES AND THEIR  
FREQUENCIES

Category and Definition	Number of Cases
1. High Effectiveness Feel that the average citizen can have "quite a lot" or "some" influence on government decisions	91
2. Medium Effectiveness Feel that the average citizen can have "very little" or "no" influence	93
3. Low Effectiveness Feel the average citizen can have "little" or "no" influence, and raise their own ineffectiveness in earlier discussion of issues	60
Total	244

<sup>3</sup> In the political study previously referred to (3), the measure of political efficacy did not immediately follow discussion of particular issues. In that case, however, the entire questionnaire was devoted to an imminent election and the issues surrounding the campaign, so that involvement and context were already established.

<sup>4</sup> We have assumed that when an individual answers a question about the influence an average citizen can have on government decisions, he is, in virtually all cases, answering on the basis of the degree of influence he feels that he personally can have.

on public affairs. Since the questions on problems preceded the discussion of citizen influence, and contained no reference to personal influence, we considered spontaneous mention of personal ineffectiveness a sign of the salience of this attitude in the psychological structure of the individual. For people who interject the note of helplessness when they are initially confronted with a public issue, this psychological characteristic must be an important part of the view of the broader world.<sup>5</sup> The third—and

<sup>5</sup> While we recognized that war is a unique public issue and that individuals who raise their own helplessness with respect to war might not if the issue were less extreme, we nevertheless maintain the point that people who interject personal weakness in this context are likely to be more dominated by a sense of powerlessness generally than those who do not raise the issue.

least effective—group was formed, then, of those respondents who thought that the average citizen could have little or no influence, and who also raised their own sense of ineffectiveness spontaneously in the earlier discussion.

The groups that emerged from this categorization, with their frequencies, appear in Table 1.

In addition to respondents who were dropped from the analysis because they failed to meet our criterion of involvement, three cases were dropped because they raised their feeling of ineffectiveness in the discussion of war, but contradicted this position on the later direct question about the average citizen's influence. Ten cases were dropped because they gave no response to one or another of the criterion questions.

## II. THE QUESTION OF GENERALITY: THE SENSE OF EFFECTIVENESS IN RELATION TO MORE PERSONAL ATTITUDES

In a great deal of the writing on the sense of effectiveness the assumption is made that this attitude in relation to public affairs is the same as a more personal sense of competence or potency, or at any rate that it is simply a social manifestation of a more pervasive personality characteristic. It seems to the present authors that this assumption requires testing.

In the present section of the analysis, then, we have posed the question of the generality of the sense of effectiveness. Is the individual who feels that he can have a measure of influence on public affairs, more than the ineffective citizen, characterized by a feeling of competence or potency in other areas of life? Put another way, the question is whether the sense of political effectiveness stems primarily from experiences in public af-

fairs and is therefore relatively uncorrelated with any similar sense of competence in interpersonal or occupational (or other more day-to-day) situations—or whether, on the other hand, it is a symptom, in one area, of a more general characteristic of the person's conception of the world, which will be manifest in other areas as well. Our general prediction was that the latter view would prove closer to the case.

We predicted that people who had a sense of effectiveness in public affairs would be characterized by greater satisfaction, security, and feelings of competence in their personal lives than those who felt ineffective. We speculated, with previous writers, that "people who feel impotent, dependent, or completely occupied with personal problems will not have the energy and courage necessary"



to maintain the kind of commitment to broad issues implied in a high degree of the sense of political effectiveness (7, p. 65). Although there are obviously other possible bases for an active involvement in public affairs—e.g., some people may compensate for personal insecurities through an active and effective role in civic affairs—we predicted that in general a positive relationship would exist between feelings of personal competence and the sense of political effectiveness.

#### A. SATISFACTION, SECURITY, AND COMPETENCE IN THE PERSONAL SPHERE

For measuring the more personal variables, we included questions about the respondent's own life and his feelings about his personal and interpersonal affairs. The questions, listed below, can be grouped psychologically into three classes: those dealing with the respondent's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with his present life; those dealing with the individual's expectation of positive or negative outcomes in the future; and those which probe the respondent's perception of himself as an effective or non-effective agent in the determination of his own future.

The questions, grouped under appropriate headings, read:

##### *Satisfaction*

a. Some people feel that their lives have worked out just the way they wanted. Others feel they've really had bad breaks. How do you feel about the way your life is turning out?

b. How does your life compare with what you wanted it to be like?

c. Some people feel quite secure financially; others have many worries about how they will get along. How is it in your case?

d. If you had a choice, would you like to see a son of yours do the same kind of work you do, or some other kind of work? (If different) What kind?

##### *Security About the Future*

e. What do you think your chances are of living the kind of life you'd like to have? Do you think they are pretty good, not so good or what?

f. What do you think your chances are of being promoted in the job you have now?

g. On the whole, what would you say your future looks like at the place you work—pretty bright, not much to look forward to, or what?

h. Would you say your job is a steady and secure one, or one that could easily fold up?

##### *Perception of Self*

i. Some people feel they can make pretty definite plans for their lives for the next few years. Others feel they aren't in a position to plan ahead. How about you—do you feel able to plan ahead or not?

j. When you do make plans, do you usually feel they're almost certain to work out, or that you can't count on them working out, or what?

To form a more reliable measure of feelings about personal affairs, the data from Questions a, e, and i in the preceding list—each a generally phrased question from one of the three areas—were combined in an "index of personal competence."

In addition to the theoretical ground for combining these items—i.e., that they represented three important elements of personal security—the combination yielded an index of reproducibility of .94. This indication of a relatively high degree of internal consistency provided a methodological justification for considering the combined items a single index. Nonscalar groups were collapsed into the scale patterns having the same number of positive responses.

The major scale patterns are as follows:

a. *High*. People who give confident answers to all three questions.

b. *Moderately high*. Individuals who are satisfied, feel optimistic about the future, but do not feel that they are in a position to plan their own futures.

c. *Moderately low*. Individuals who are satis-

fied with their lives, but feel their chances for attaining their aspirations are poor and that they are not in control of their futures.

d. *Low.* Those who are dissatisfied, feel their chances are poor, and that they have no control over the future.

The relationship between the effectiveness variable and personal reactions was tested with the index of personal competence and also with responses to a number of individual items. Throughout this part of the analysis, chi square was used to test differences among groups, and product-moment coefficients were computed to obtain estimates of correlation. The correlation coefficients were derived by the method suggested by Wert *et al.* (10, pp. 305-313) for broad categories, and were corrected for coarse groupings.

## B. RESULTS

The central notion of this section of our analysis was that, in general, individuals who feel effective in the public sphere will be characterized by greater feelings of security in the personal environment as well. We predicted that those who feel unable to operate meaningfully in the public sphere would, more often than not, manifest a sense of being thwarted, of apprehension and lack of control with respect to events of everyday living.

Before presenting the tests of this hypothesis, a word should be said about the role of demographic characteristics in the determination of the sense of effectiveness. In research dealing with social attitudes, it is characteristic to find substantial relationships between psychological variables and education, income, and/or occupation. With an attitude like the sense of effectiveness, there is good reason to anticipate such findings. Assuming that actual power to affect public decisions is differentially distributed in the various strata of society, then indices of status like education or income should relate to feelings of effectiveness as well.

In other studies of the sense of effectiveness (2,3), these relationships have occurred, and

we had planned in the analysis of the present study to control for critical demographic characteristics. The preliminary analysis indicated, however, that our measure of effectiveness did not relate significantly to status measures. The correlation between education and effectiveness was .11; between income and effectiveness was .09; and between occupation and effectiveness was .09. Based on chi square, the probabilities of such relations arising by chance were, respectively, between .10 and .20, > .80, and > .20.

There are two possible explanations for this difference between our results and those of previous analyses. The first is that our measure is not identical to those used in other research. Our inclusion of spontaneous references to respondents' lack of influence may change our measure enough to explain the unique absence of relations to demographic factors. We also phrased questions in terms of the average citizen's, rather than the respondent's own, influence. Another possible explanation however, lies in the nature of the population we sampled.

Our respondents were all drawn from the labor force of Detroit. This selection tended to reduce the range of demographic variables. Detroit is a high wage-rate city, and, in addition, our exclusion of the permanently unemployed or retired from our sample meant that we interviewed no people of extremely low income, and may have excluded some of the very high as well.<sup>4</sup> By reducing the range of a variable, we obtain a measure of control over it, and we also reduce the chances of significant relationships occurring when the variable is run against any other.

The fact that demographic factors were not significantly related to the effectiveness measure simplified the analysis, since no special control on them

<sup>4</sup>While it is not possible to make a definitive test of the extent to which the nature of our sample accounted for the absence of relationship between status and the sense of effectiveness, we were able to demonstrate that this factor had some influence. Using as a base, data from the political study conducted by the Survey Research Center (3), we selected from a national sample all interviews taken in metropolitan areas with employed persons. In this group, compared to the full national sample, there was a reduction in the relationship between status and "political efficacy." The range in status measures was, even in this case, larger than the range for our Detroit labor-force sample.

was necessary in testing relationships between attitudinal variables.

### 1. Effectiveness and the Index of Personal Competence

The relation between the two major measures is presented as item 1 in Table 2. The results bear out our prediction. The highly effective group of respondents scores significantly higher on the competence index than does the low

group, with the medium group about in the middle.

Similar tests of the hypothesis with responses to individual questions follow under the aspect of competence to which they are appropriate.

### 2. Current Satisfaction or Feeling of Being Thwarted

A number of comparisons of our effectiveness groups were made in order to test

TABLE 2  
RELATION BETWEEN SENSE OF EFFECTIVENESS IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD EVENTS IN THE PERSONAL SPHERE (SHOWING PROPORTIONS GIVING SELECTED RESPONSES)

Personal Attitude <sup>a</sup>	Effectiveness			$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>
	High ( <i>N</i> = 99)	Medium ( <i>N</i> = 93)	Low ( <i>N</i> = 60)			
1. Index of personal competence						
<i>a.</i> High	.45	.30	.22	24.6	< .001	.47
<i>b.</i> Low	.02	.15	.27			
2. Outcome of life plans						
<i>a.</i> About as planned	.51	.54	.35	3.65	< .10 > .05	.17
3. Satisfaction with outcome of life plans <sup>b</sup>	.82	.73	.59	6.6	< .05	.28
4. Feeling of financial security <sup>c</sup>	.68	.65	.41	8.6	< .01	.26
5. Attitude toward occupation						
<i>a.</i> Want son to follow similar occupation	.23	.11	.06	9.8	< .01	.30
<i>b.</i> Want son to follow different (unspecified) occupation	.07	.12	.23			
6. Expectation of promotion <sup>d</sup>						
<i>a.</i> Chances are good	.43	.30	.07	14.1	< .001	.38
7. Evaluation of job future <sup>d</sup>						
<i>a.</i> Positive evaluation	.73	.65	.52	4.1	< .10 > .05	.25
8. Feeling of job security <sup>e</sup>	.85	.84	.74	1.7	< .30 > .20	.11
9. Index of job outlook <sup>d</sup>						
<i>a.</i> High positive index	.30	.21	.05	16.2	< .001	.43
10. Security about personal plans <sup>f</sup>	.85	.68	.54	24.8	< .001	.37

<sup>a</sup> For verbatim phrasing of the measures in this column see text, Section I.

<sup>b</sup> The number of cases is reduced since it was not always possible to tell whether the respondent was satisfied or dissatisfied with the comparison. Therefore, not all respondents could be rated. The numbers should read: High 55, Medium 55, Low 34.

<sup>c</sup> The number of cases was reduced because Form II of the questionnaire did not include the question on financial security, and unemployed respondents were not asked the question. The numbers should read: High 66, Medium 61, Low 44.

<sup>d</sup> The number of cases is reduced by the exclusion of the unemployed, self-employed, and those given Form II of the questionnaire. The numbers should read: High 60, Medium 56, Low 41.

<sup>e</sup> The number of cases is reduced because unemployed and self-employed people were not asked this question. The numbers should read: High 77, Medium 74, Low 56.

<sup>f</sup> The number of cases is reduced here for the following reason. During the early stage of the interviewing there was some confusion on the part of a few interviewers about the question on plans working out, with the result that they were using it as though it were contingent on the person's saying in the previous question that he felt in a position to plan ahead. Actually the question was meant to be asked of all respondents. Those cases where it was not asked were eliminated from the table. The numbers should read: High 83, Medium 84, Low 52.

the hypothesis that ineffectiveness is related to feelings of frustration and of being thwarted in the personal sphere.

Respondents were asked "How does your life compare with what you wanted it to be like?" Results on this question are in the direction predicted and are consistent with the other findings of this section. They appear on line 2 of Table 2.

Respondents who are *low* on effectiveness are least likely to think their lives are similar to what they had anticipated. There is, however, no substantial difference between the other two groups on this response, and the small difference which does appear is not in the direction predicted.

It was possible, of course, that a person could feel his life had turned out quite differently from what he had expected or planned on, yet be satisfied with the outcome. Coders were therefore asked to rate respondents, where possible, as satisfied or dissatisfied with the comparison described above between their plans and life situation. Results of these ratings are presented on line 3 of Table 2, and indicate that satisfaction with present life condition is related significantly to the sense of effectiveness.

Although we have seen that there is no significant relationship between income and feeling of effectiveness, we had predicted that the less effective groups would report *feeling* economically thwarted more often than the effective group. In Table 2, line 4, we see that this was in fact the case.

The fact that the ineffective groups feel thwarted in their occupational roles can be seen in responses to the question, "If you had a choice, would you like to see a son of yours do the same kind of work you do, or some other kind of

work?" (If different) "What kind?" (Table 2, line 5.)

Respondents in the least effective group are least likely to say they want their sons to do work similar to their own. More often than other respondents they reject their own work as an ideal for a son, but suggest no alternative occupation. It is as though they were saying: "Let him do something else. I don't know what, but not what I'm doing."

### 3. *Anticipation of Future Satisfaction*

Included in the competence index was the item: "What do you think your chances are of living the kind of life you'd like to have?" Other questions concerning anticipation of future success or failure were asked in the context of occupational achievement. It should be kept in mind that our effectiveness groups did not differ significantly in occupational classification.

Results of two occupational future questions are presented on lines 6 and 7 of Table 2. The second question produced results which do not meet our test of significance, but are in the predicted direction.

The final question on occupational future was: "Would you say your job is a steady and secure one, or one that could easily fold up?" Results of this question, seen on line 8, were not significant, but again were in the direction predicted. Apparently such reality factors as seniority are operating here to reduce the relationship between outlook toward one's occupational future and personal effectiveness. There was so little distribution in responses to this question (nearly everyone feels his job is secure) that it would be unusual to find a high degree of association.

Since the occupational life of an indi-

vidual is so important—simply on a time basis, it occupies a central position in adult life—we wanted to derive the most reliable possible measure of the occupational outlook to relate to effectiveness.

The three items on occupational future just presented were therefore combined into a single measure. As we would expect from the unity of content, they scaled significantly better than could be expected by chance. (Coefficient of reproducibility = .98.) Nonscalar groups were collapsed into the scale patterns having the same number of positive responses, and the two lowest scale groups were combined because of small numbers. Anticipation of positive outcome in one's job should certainly be a good indication and perhaps determiner of a feeling of effectiveness. We predicted a positive relationship between job outlook and effectiveness. The results presented as item 9 in Table 2 bear out this prediction.

#### 4. Control Over Future

In addition to the question on planning included in the competence index, respondents were asked, "When you do make plans, do you usually feel they're almost certain to work out, or that you can't count on them working out, or what?" Again the prediction was that those people who feel ineffective with respect to national affairs would feel least able to count on personal plans working out. This, it seemed to us, would represent a general apprehension about the future and a feeling that the future was determined more by external events than by events or actions subject to the respondent's own control. In item 10 of the summary table we see that the results correspond to the prediction.

Following the question "What are

your chances of living the kind of life you'd like to have?" respondents were asked why they thought their chances were good or poor. Factors mentioned were categorized according to whether they were personal (intelligence, hard work, skill) or environmental (financial situation, family situation, job situation). We predicted that less effective people, when they say their chances are poor, would attribute their poor chances to more external factors not subject to their own control. Table 3 shows the proportions of both types of factors given by our groups in cases where they say their chances are good and where they are said to be poor.

It is interesting to note that the effective group attributed their chances, whether good or poor, about equally to personal and environmental factors. (The variation in proportions does not differ from chance expectancy.) On the other hand, the low effectiveness group

TABLE 3  
RELATION BETWEEN EFFECTIVENESS AND  
ATTRIBUTION OF GOOD OR POOR PROSPECTS  
TO PERSONAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL  
FACTORS

Good prospects attributed to	Effectiveness		
	High	Medium	Low
Personal factors	(N = 75) 47%	(N = 61) 59%	(N = 36) 64%
Environmental factors	49	39	36
Not ascertained	4	2	—
	100%	100%	100%
Poor prospects attributed to	Effectiveness		
	High	Medium	Low
Personal factors	(N = 15) 47%	(N = 31) 33%	(N = 22) 20%
Environmental factors	48	64	68
Not ascertained	5	3	12
	100%	100%	100%

stresses personal factors when success is anticipated and environmental factors when they anticipate failure. The shift in proportions of personal and environmental factors cited by this group would be expected by chance less than one time in a hundred.

#### C. SUMMARY ON THE QUESTION OF GENERALITY

The sense of effectiveness in response to public affairs has been shown to be related to a feeling of competence in a variety of areas in the more immediate sphere of personal affairs. The relationships found are moderate in size. The correlation coefficients range from .11 to .47, with the majority clustering around .30. The fact that the two composite measures of personal security (i.e., the index of personal competence and the index of job outlook) yield the highest correlations, seems to indicate that more

refined measures might reveal a closer relationship between personal competence and the sense of political effectiveness. It is nevertheless obvious that there are other important determinants of the sense of political effectiveness with which we have not dealt in the present study.

The order of magnitude of relationships demonstrated and the consistency of these relations appear to justify the interpretation that the sense of political effectiveness is to a significant extent a reflection of a more general psychological competence. In the remaining pages of this report we will turn to the question of the relation of "competence" to certain "deeper" personality variables, in an effort to clarify further the reticulate connections between our social attitude (the sense of effectiveness) and other aspects of the individual's stable psychological structure.

### III. THE SENSE OF COMPETENCE IN RELATION TO TWO EGO VARIABLES

In previous studies a passive-receptive response to an environment which is considered uncontrollable has been linked theoretically to the defense mechanisms of denial and projection. In the Authoritarianism series (1) it was demonstrated that individuals who scored high on ethnocentrism and latent fascist attitudes were generally passive in orientation toward a hostile and unpredictable world. It was also shown that this picture of a hostile world had intrapsychic origins. Authoritarians were people who could not accept normal hostility in themselves, and dealt with these ego-alien elements by denying their internal existence and projecting them into the environment.

Mussen and Wysinski (7) found a

generally external orientation among politically apathetic individuals. They theorize that political apathy is based on a defense pattern similar to that of the authoritarian personality—that is, the apathetic individual, unable to accept his own hostility, shifts it into the external world, which then becomes threatening. The difference, they speculate, between the apathetic and ethnocentric individuals lies in the means by which the two handle this self-made hostile world. The ethnocentric person imputes hostility to a restricted segment of his environment (e.g., an ethnic minority) and expresses his hostility—now legitimized by the evil nature of the enemy outgroup—with impunity. The apathetic individual, on the other hand,



responds by withdrawing from a more diffusely hostile and threatening world.

We included in the design of the study a series of more or less projective instruments for the purpose of measuring two aspects of personality. These were: (a) the nature of the respondent's conception of the external world, and (b) his response to internal reality—that is, to normal impulses and feelings. The inquiry into these variables and their relations to competence was prompted by our interest in establishing more specifically the meaning of the competence variable.

Competence, as measured in this study, is a conscious-level phenomenon—a feeling of relative satisfaction with and control over one's own life. The person scoring low is one who experiences frustration and thwarting and feels that the determination of his life is somehow out of his hands.

The question that next arises concerns the source of this feeling of competence. Does it stem solely from a concept of a capricious and oppressive environment, or does it also reflect a similar relation to the internal environment which is projected onto the outer world? The question reduces, in one sense, to the amount of information revealed by the competence index—whether it indicates both the level of comfort in dealings with the environment and the nature of the process on which the level is based, or only the former.

One might almost say that the very fact that the apathetic individual is not able (because of social or personal pressures) to delineate one aspect of the environment as a receptacle and restrict his hostile projections, leaves him no alternative but to withdraw. If the whole world is threatening, there is not even a focus for retaliation.

We predicted, in line with this previous work, that highly competent individuals would, in general, have a more positive outlook toward the external world, and also that they would, on the average, be more tolerant of normal impulses and feelings than those individuals who feel less competent.

#### A. MEASURES OF RESPONSE TO EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL REALITY

The following series of questions was asked of each respondent:

Now, I'd like to ask you a few questions about the way people sometimes feel, and what you think they should do about it.

1. Take a person who has an awful lot of worries, and they're really getting him down. What do you think he should do about it?

2. What do you think makes some people worry a lot when other people hardly ever worry.

3. In general, what things would you say help a person most to get ahead these days?

4. Some people feel that it's good for everyone to get really angry now and then, and "blow off steam." Others say it's childish to let yourself feel so angry. How do you feel about this?

5. We hear a lot these days about different ways to bring up children. Would you tell me whether you agree or disagree with these statements about raising children? (*Probe for each: Why?*)

a. Children should have no worries—they should be protected from troubles as much as possible.

b. Parents should plan out the child's program each day so they're sure he is learning the right things.

c. Children should be taught to fight their own battles as early as possible.

d. Parents should make children try things that are a little beyond them in order to make them ambitious.

6. Do you think it's a good idea or a bad idea to tell children that babies are brought by the stork? *Why?*

7. What would you say was the nicest thing about being a child?

8. If a daughter of yours were getting married, what things would you want to know about the man she was marrying? Anything else?

Responses to these questions were analyzed for indications of the respond-

ents' conception of external reality and acceptance or rejection of normal impulses. The questions, the variables to which they refer, and the code categories used as indicators, appear in Table 4.

In addition to these questions, a three-card version of the TAT (cards 3BM, 6BM, and 20) was administered to a subsample of 76 cases, and the story responses were scored for the same variables. Scoring dimensions and critical categories are presented in Table 5.

Scoring was done by two independent judges, with an average percentage of agreement of 79 for individual categories.

With respect to the conception of external reality, a positive view was inferred from any reference to a pleasant or helpful environment, indications of curiosity about the world, a sense of predictability about it, a preference for reality rather than myth, and pleasure in the exercise of responsibility.

TABLE 4  
PROJECTIVE QUESTIONS AND CRITICAL RESPONSE CATEGORIES

Item and Variable	Code Category
<b>Questions on the conception of external reality</b>	
1. What things would you say help a person most to get ahead these days?	
a. uncontrollable world	Exclusive mention of luck, chance, family connections
b. controllable world	Any mention of hard work, ambition, getting along with people
2. Children should have no worries, they should be protected from troubles as much as possible	
a. oppressive world	Agreement with statement
Reasons for agreement or disagreement	
b. oppressive world	The world is too difficult a place for children, (or) the world is difficult and they might as well learn that it is
3. Do you think it's a good idea or a bad idea to tell children that babies are brought by the stork?	
a. preference for myth	Good idea to tell children the stork story
4. What do you think makes some people worry a lot when other people hardly ever worry?	
a. oppressive world, uncontrollable	Too many responsibilities, poverty, family troubles, death of loved ones, other disasters
5. What would you say was the nicest thing about being a child?	
a. responsibility oppressive	Lack of responsibility
6. Children should be taught to fight their own battles as early as possible.	
a. harsh social world	Strong agreement because world is viewed as harsh, a jungle
<b>Questions on the acceptance/rejection of normal Impulses</b>	
7. (Suppose) a person has an awful lot of worries and they're really getting him down. What do you think he should do about it?	
a. impulse denial	Pull self together; exercise self-control, stop thinking about it, rise above it, occupy mind with other things, etc.

TABLE 4—continued

Item and Variable	Code Category
8. Some people feel that it's good for everyone to get really angry now and then and "blow off steam." Others say it's childish to let yourself feel so angry. How do you feel about this?	
a. impulse denial	It's childish to let yourself feel so angry
9. Parents should plan out the child's program each day so they're sure he is learning the right things	
a. suspicion of untrained impulses	Agreement with statement
Reasons for agreement of disagreement	
b. suspicion of impulses	Child is basically bad, has to be directed into good, (or) no planning can prevent the child from learning bad things—it's in his nature
10. Parents should make children try things that are a little beyond them in order to make them ambitious	
a. suspicion of untrained impulses	Agreement with statement
Reasons for agreement	
b. suspicion of impulses	Child is by nature lazy, will not strive if not pushed
11. Reasons for telling children that babies are brought by the stork (question 3)	
a. rejection of impulses	Sex is bad, immoral, evil
12. If a daughter of yours were getting married, what things would you want to know about the man she was marrying?	
a. suspicion of impulses	Whether he was a drinker, philanderer, criminal

Denial of impulses was inferred from any indication of suspicion about untrained impulses or rejection of normal expression of emotionality.

#### B. ANALYSIS

In the results presented below, tests involving responses to the projective questions were made on 314 cases. The two remaining respondents did not answer one or another of the questions included in the competence index. The chi-square technique was employed for testing differences, and product-moment correlation coefficients were computed.

Predictions about the story responses to the TAT were based on the subsample of 76 cases in which this measure was administered. These 76 cases were separated into three groups on the competence index (low and very low were combined). In the tables referring to

story responses, percentages are based on the total number of stories rather than the number of respondents. Since such a procedure may have an inflative effect on differences when there is a positive intraclass correlation within clusters of responses given by a single respondent, it was necessary to use a formula for the variance of a proportion which accommodates for the effect of clustering.<sup>7</sup> Since the use of such a formula is permissible

7. The following formula, conventionally used in survey analysis of clustered responses (6, p. 208), was used:

$$S_p^2 = \frac{1}{m(m-1)A^2} \sum_1^m x_i^2 - \frac{1}{m} \left( \sum_1^m x_i \right)^2$$

where:

$m$  equals the number of clusters (i.e., individuals);

$A$  equals the cluster size (i.e., number of story-responses per individual);

$X_i$  equals the total score of the  $i$ th individual.

TABLE 5  
SCORING CATEGORIES FOR THE TAT STORIES

Category scheme and variable	Category
I. Conception of External Reality	
1. Nature of response	
a. curiosity about a new task	Responds with an imaginative story
b. apprehension about a new task	Responds with card-description or some form of rejection of the task
2. Setting of the story	
a. oppressive environment	Stories in which the theme is one of environmental oppression, in contrast to those in which the theme concerns personal or interpersonal conflict
3. Need of central character	
a. curiosity about environment, movement outward	Need for achievement, independence
b. oppressive environment	Need for relief, dependency, succorance, or escape
4. Nature of environment	
a. oppressive environment	Environmental blocks obstruct the movement of the central character
5. Action of central character	
a. movement outward, utilization of skills	Goal-directed action by central character
6. Outcome of the story	
a. curiosity about environment	Completion of story
b. noncurious about environment	Unresolved ending
c. oppressive environment	Failure ending
d. utilization of skills	Success ending accompanied by instrumental activity
II. Acceptance/rejection of normal impulses	
7. Feeling expressed by central character	
a. impulse denial	No mention of feelings of central character

only in the case of a fourfold table, tests were made between the extreme competence groups. The tests are presented in terms of *t* values, since the test of proportions is the same as chi square in the case of a fourfold table. All three competence categories were used in computing correlation coefficients.

### C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In Tables 6 and 7 we present findings from the projective questions and the TAT stories that refer to the respondents' conceptions of the outside world. We find that individuals who score low on the personal competence index consistently give more answers which reflect a picture of an oppressive, uncontrollable external reality. Compared to high scorers, they more often attribute success

(item 1) exclusively to chance, luck, or other factors beyond individual control. More often than high scorers they take a somewhat overprotective position on child training, and give reasons which indicate that the world is a difficult place (item 2). They prefer myth to reality (item 3) more often than individuals who feel competent. On items 4 and 5 which indicate, respectively, attitude toward responsibility and the attribution of worry to external factors, the differences which occur are in the predicted direction but do not meet our criterion of significance.

The single item in this area which does not even order the competence groups in a manner consistent with our prediction is one (item 6) in which reality is seen not merely as oppressive

but actually hostile. This response is similar to the "world as a jungle" conception of the authoritarian personality, and is the only one of our items which clearly implies projection of repressed hostility.

In analysis of the TAT protocols we find again evidence that respondents who do not feel competent have less optimistic expectations about the world around them. They manifest less curiosity about a new stimulus and are less active in approach to the environment. They reject the story-telling task more often, and the responses they do give are more often bare descriptions of the cards or minimal stories, less often imaginative stories. Themes of stories given by people who score low on competence more often center on a man's struggle against external forces, more often picture the environment as oppressive rather than helpful, and more often are

unresolved or have failure resolutions.

Those people who feel competent are more likely to reveal in their stories and answers an active interest in the environment, and anticipation of a pleasant, manageable world. They portray man in conflict with himself or others, striving to achieve and become independent, and reaching his goals through directed effort. Responsibility is central to this view, and is assumed with a sense of gratification.

Of twenty tests (8 in Table 6 and 12 in Table 7) made of the hypothesis relating the sense of competence to the nature of the individual's conception of external reality, eleven yielded results significant beyond the 5 per cent level of confidence. Eight of the remaining nine tests showed differences in the predicted direction, but did not meet this criterion. Four of the eight have *p* values between .05 and .10, and four have *p*

TABLE 6  
PROPORTIONS OF COMPETENCE GROUPS GIVING CRITICAL RESPONSES TO PROJECTIVE QUESTIONS

Item and critical category	Competence				$\chi^2$ ( <i>df</i> = 3)	<i>p</i> level	<i>r</i>
	Very High ( <i>N</i> = 116)	High ( <i>N</i> = 102)	Low ( <i>N</i> = 60)	Very Low ( <i>N</i> = 36)			
Conception of external reality							
Item 1							
a. uncontrollable world*	.18	.25	.33	.37	6.62	.10-.05	.20
b. controllable world*	.40	.36	.24	.19	14.00	.01	.25
Item 2							
a. oppressive world	.50	.64	.59	.70	6.77	.10-.05	.18
b. oppressive world	.28	.40	.37	.55	9.97	.02-.01	.23
Item 3							
a. preference for myth	.29	.33	.37	.58	9.78	.05-.02	.21
Item 4							
a. oppressive world, uncontrollable	.12	.22	.29	.31	4.87	.20-.10	.15
Item 5							
a. oppressive world	.60	.68	.72	.75	4.69	.20-.10	.16
Item 6							
a. harsh social world	.18	.17	.20	.17	.183	.99-.98	.01

\* This question was asked of only 236 respondents. The numbers in the competence categories should read: Very High 81, High 83, Low 41, Very Low 31.

TABLE 7  
PROPORTIONS OF COMPETENCE GROUPS GIVING CRITICAL RESPONSES TO TAT

Category	Competence			<i>t</i> (High vs. Low)	<i>p</i> value	<i>r</i>
	Very High 1 ( <i>N</i> = 99)	High 2 ( <i>N</i> = 51)	Low and Very Low 3-4 ( <i>N</i> = 81)			
I. Conception of external reality						
1. Nature of response						
a. imaginative story	.55	.41	.35	2.1377	.02	.25
b. rejection of task	.18	.23	.25	.955	.20-.10	-.14
2. Setting of story						
a. environmental oppression	.30	.43	.52	1.572	.10-.05	-.19
b. personal and/or interpersonal conflict	.56	.49	.42	2.174	.02	.21
3. Need of central character						
a. independence or achievement	.66	.55	.46	2.486	.01	.26
b. dependency, succorance relief	.31	.39	.51	2.475	.01	-.24
4. Nature of environment						
a. oppressive obstructive	.26	.41	.46	2.163	.02	-.22
b. pleasant, helpful	.12	.06	.07	1.099	.20-.10	.13
5. Action of main character						
a. goal directed	.46	.29	.19	4.219	.01	.36
6. Outcome						
a. success	.52	.31	.37	1.783	.05	.20
b. unresolved	.26	.41	.37	1.296	.10-.05	-.17
c. success with instrumental activity*	.70	.56	.41	3.8173	.01	.33

\* In this case, the number on which proportions are based consists of the number of successful stories told. The numbers for the three competence groups were: Very High 48, High 16, Low and Very Low 32. The formula for computing the variance of proportions was in this case one designed for use with unequal sized clusters (6).

values between .10 and .20. The consistency of these differences may be regarded as indicating a trend in the predicted direction.

In relating the competence variable to responses to *internal* reality, on the other hand, we found no significant results in the nine tests made. Our low competence group seems no less aware or accepting of normal impulses and emotionality than those scoring high on the index of competence. They do not mention feeling states less frequently in their TAT stories (the *p* value falls between .30 and .40). They are no more likely to reject expression of impulses and feelings (the *p* values for differences

on items 7 and 8 in Table 4 fall between .30 and .50; for item 11 the *p* value is between .90 and .95). And they show no more suspicion of untrained or unsupervised impulsivity (items 9, 10, and 12 of Table 4; *p* values are between .50 and .70, between .10 and .20, and between .70 and .80 respectively). In the one case where a difference approached significance (item 10, *p* falls between .10 and .20), the high competence group was somewhat more resistive to normal impulses than were those who scored low on competence.

We conclude from these results that the conscious feeling of competence rests on the nature of the individual's con-



*ception of the outside world, but that at least as measured in our study, the person's mode of response to the internal environment does not contribute significantly to the competence variable.*

The following tentative interpretation of these results may be offered. The sense of personal competence—a variable we have found useful in predicting a person's orientation toward public affairs—implies a binding commitment to external reality. Assuming that no reality is perfectly gratifying—that everyone's life situation involves some degree of frustration—the person who says "I can to a significant extent determine the conditions of my life," is committing himself to attend and to affect the world he lives in. The opposed position ("I am not in control of what happens") provides a satisfactory escape from such a commitment. If one has no control over the situation in any case, there is also no need to maintain a high level of interest in the world around.

This does not mean, of course, that some individuals who feel they have no control will not at the same time be active and interested in the external world. There are obviously other factors which contribute to the individual's involvement in events outside himself. Social pressure, conformity to primary group standards, and the "play motive" (8) are among the many forces that may promote an interest in public affairs quite apart from any conception the individual has concerning his power to affect the world. Since we have no reason to assume that these other factors are differentially distributed in the competence groupings, we have assumed in this discussion that the reader will supply the phrase "other things being

equal." In the present discussion we are interested in why the sense of competence should influence a person's attentiveness with respect to public affairs. The interpretation of the sense of personal competence as implying a commitment to attend seems to clarify this relationship.

To make a strong commitment to events outside oneself would seem to require a view of the world as at least potentially manipulable and gratifying. Conversely, it is reasonable to assume that a person who takes a position legitimizing withdrawal from reality would also hold a more awesome picture of the outside world.

But the question of the defense foundation of these two views does not appear critical. One may conceive an unchangeable environment—or changeable but beyond any measure of personal control—either because one has had consistent experiences with a difficult environment, or because one projects an unmanageable (and denied) set of impulses outward onto relatively innocuous surroundings. Whatever its origin, the anticipation of satisfaction or oppression from the world appears to enter into the determination of the sense of personal competence and the level of activity with which one confronts the world.

Our results confirm Mussen and Wyszinski's (7) finding that the apathetic individual has a "generally external orientation" and shows marked passivity toward the environment, but they do not support the interpretation of these authors that this passivity is a defense against hostile impulses that have been externalized. While Mussen and Wyszinski speculate that the difference between the apathetic and ethnocentric individ-

uals lies in the nature of their response to a world invested with hostility, our data suggest that the two types also differ in the nature and derivation of the world views they hold.

The withdrawal of our low-competence group does not seem to stem from a view of a hostile world. Rather, the evidence indicates that the crucial aspect

of their world view is the element of intractability. Reality is oppressive and uncontrollable, but not necessarily permeated by personal hostility that has been projected because it is unacceptable as part of the self. The results of questions about impulses do not reveal a base of denial-projection underlying their sense of a burdensome reality.

#### IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The study from which this article derives was a sample survey of labor force members in the city of Detroit. The results of the study can be summarized under two major findings:

1. The sense of effectiveness in public affairs has been shown to be moderately but consistently related to a feeling of competence in a variety of areas in the more immediate environment of personal affairs. The questions used to measure attitudes toward the narrower personal sphere varied both in degree of specificity and in content (e.g., financial and occupational affairs, and personal planning). The fact that effectiveness was related to the sense of personal competence in a variety of areas we interpreted as an indication that this attitude toward one's role in public affairs is in many people a reflection of a more general orientation toward the world.

2. Competence was analyzed in relation to two aspects of personality—the nature of the person's conception of the outside world, and the acceptance or rejection of normal impulses. These variables were measured by a series of projective questions—primarily in the content framework of child-rearing philosophies—and by a three-card TAT measure administered to a subsample of the study population. The competence variable

showed low but consistent relations to the projective measures of the person's attitude toward external reality, but did not relate to the acceptance or rejection of normal impulses.

The primary conclusion we draw from the total study concerns the role of ego processes as mediating variables in the determination of social attitudes. In the study of attitudes toward social issues, a question which arises repeatedly is: To what extent do such attitudes reflect a rational response based on the real event in combination with some notion of self-interest; and to what extent is there an incursion on this rational process by more personal aspects of the individual's psychological integration—stemming from a unique history of experiences, and not necessarily conscious or realistic?

This question is of interest both because of the general scientific goal of understanding attitude determination, and also because of its implications for the practical problem of producing change. Educational techniques are designed to affect attitudes by changing the reality they reflect. To the extent that social attitudes are nonrationally determined, we must modify either our goals or methods in planning efforts of change.

What our analysis reveals, we believe,

is that to a statistically significant though small degree, personality variables do contribute to the person's orientation toward public affairs. We have seen that the sense of effectiveness is consistently related to a more general personal orientation—whether measured in questions dealing with everyday planning or in projective devices designed to elicit less conscious attitudes toward the world. The fact that the sense of effectiveness has been shown to be in many people a part of a general way of looking at the world—that governmental affairs become a vehicle for the expression of a personal orientation—suggests that whatever external factors enter as determinants of this attitude are at least to some extent

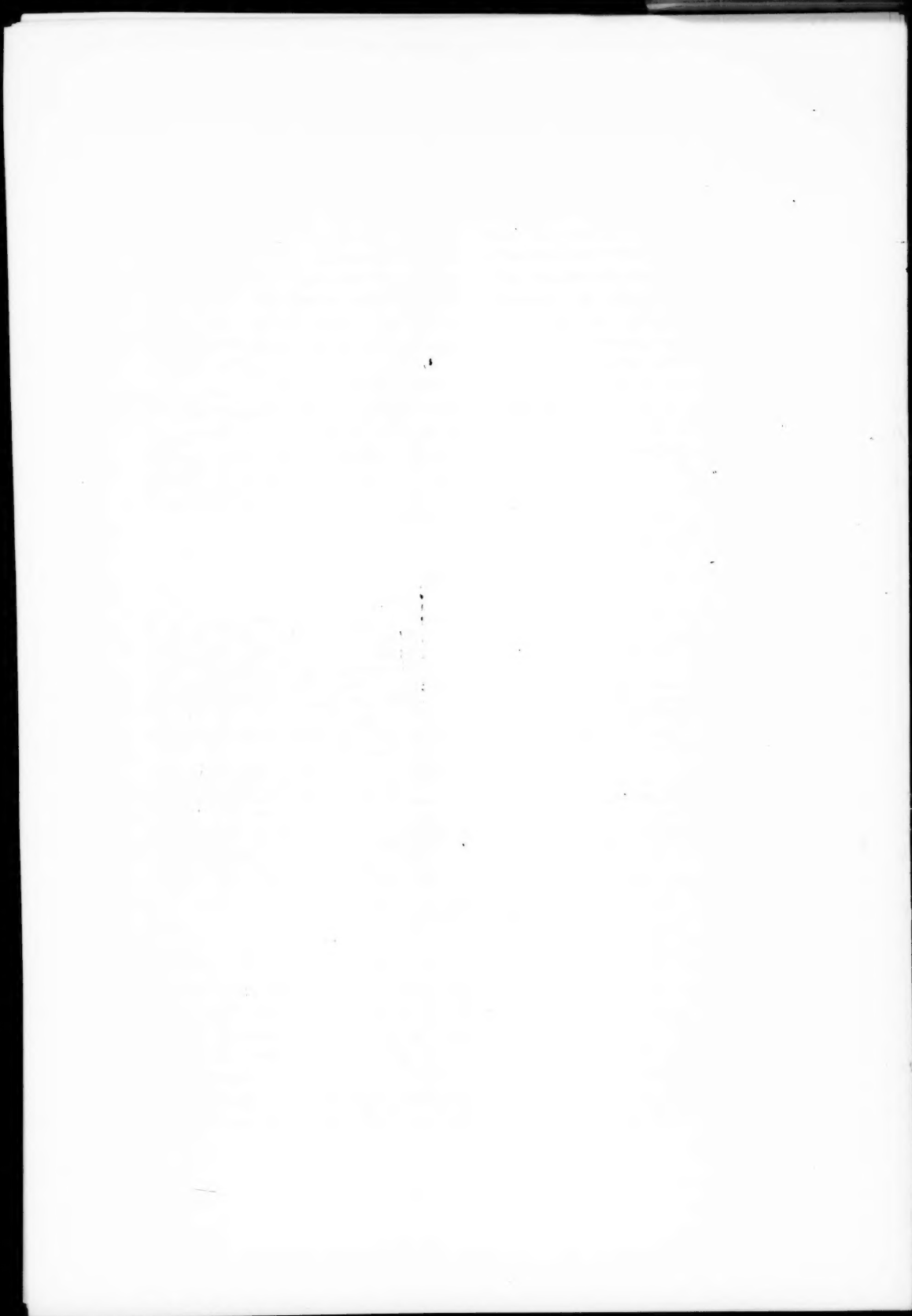
mediated through a screen of stable personality characteristics.

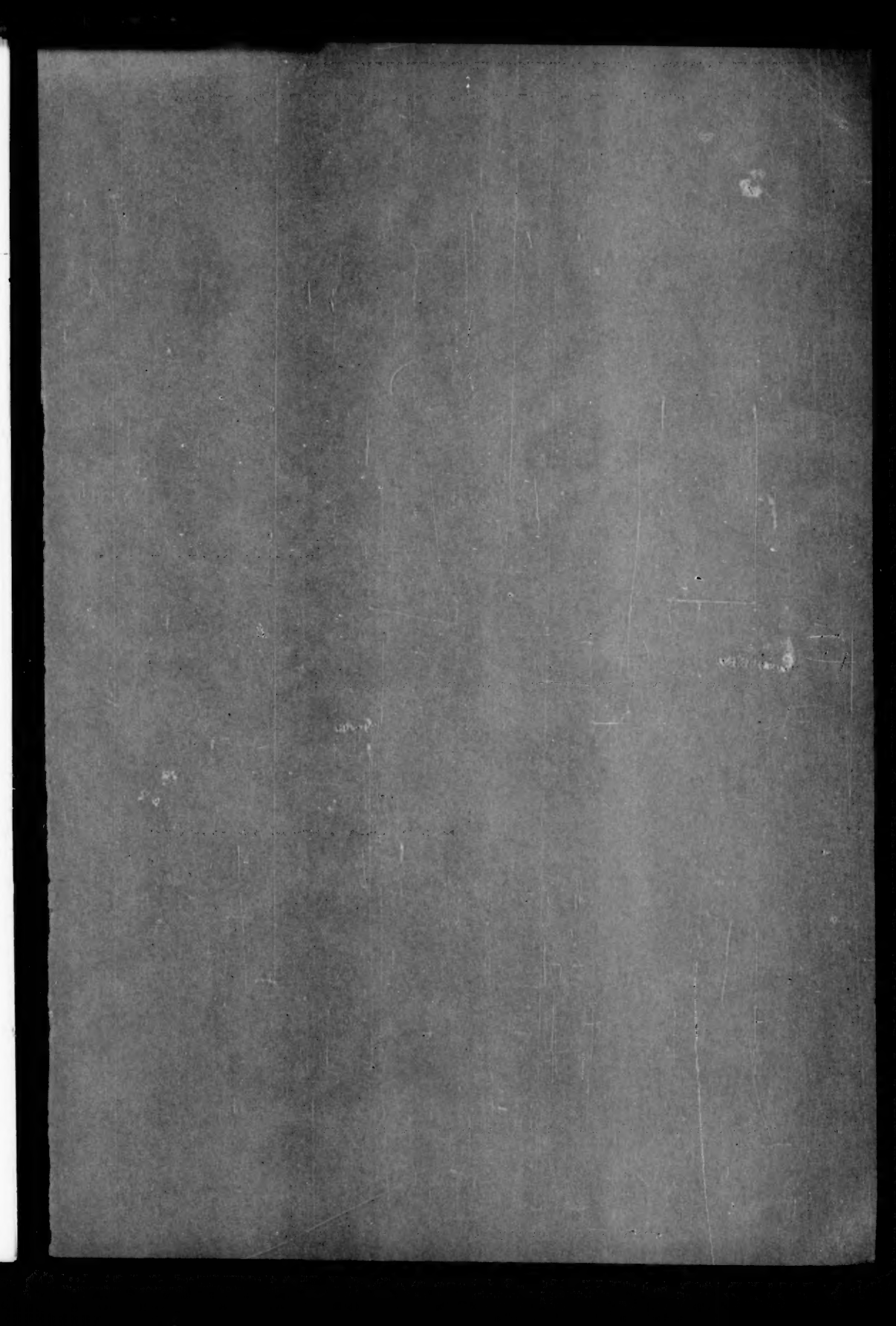
Assessing the relative contribution of rational and nonrational processes in the determination of this attitude requires further research and more refined analyses. The finding that the sense of competence relates to the view of external reality but not to the use of denial as a defense against impulses requires further confirmation, but is provocative in its discrepancy from the bulk of work on the relation of social attitudes to personality variables. Additional research might lead to a clarification of the role of defenses in the determination of social attitudes.

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